MOTHER

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the DOORS

INTERVIEW:

the 13th FLOOR ELEVATORS

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"ive seen your face before ive known you all my life
and though it's new your image cuts me like a knife"

A moment's thought, a couplet of verse; lyrics from a pop song--correct yet somehow inadequate descriptions of these lines taken from the recently successful recording, "Splash I".

As performed by the Clique, the song is a glossy, commercialized version of the original track penned by another Houston-based group, The 13th Floor Elevators. By comparison, the more recent version falls short of the original, yet it reached the top of the local charts: a reflection of the status of the pop scene locally, or perhaps a commentary on the sheer strength of the lyrics, apart from any musical encumbrance.

The music of the 13th Floor Elevators is not the proliferate volume of mediocrity that dominates Top 40 radio; nor is it at all akin to the less than elementary material produced on the local level, which seldom, if ever, makes the national charts.

Their sound is, and has been for several years, of the calibre of the music which spawned the West Coast Renaissance. In fact, it was the Elevators who first called their sound "Psychedelic", a term since used indiscriminately and erroneously by too many groups.

Their formula refined to its basic components is substantial lyrics carried on a driving, penetrating sound. The sound is the vehicle, which is the catalyst transforming effective thoughts into something more--the total experience that is the Elevators witnessed in person.

Live, they are a narcotic administered to the very fiber of your being. The sound is the medium, the volume is incredibly high, shooting straight through you. At times it is a depressant hitting the listener with a dull thud that falls upon numbed senses. Then it may suddenly become a stimulant, lifting you above the stabilized fixtures that surround you. At all times it is a continuous flowing medium of lyrics and electronic reverberations--a flowing resulting from the happy marriage of the lyrics and the music. The lyrics, devoid of their musical framework, stand on their own, but assume an even more dynamic property when fused with an electronic foundation.

The blaring quality of guitars at maximum volume underlaid with the haunting wailing of the jug and words whose meaning becomes a musical tool in themselves all serve to send the message home. This is the experience of the 13th Floor Elevators.

Are You Experienced?

The above theme on the 13th Floor Elevators was written well in advance of our securing an interview with them. It fittingly describes the reaction to an Elevators performance. What follows is an interview that was held at International Artists record company at 10 a.m. in the morning. Due to the

early hour, Stacy Sutherland was unable to be there; and Roky Erikson, who was there, was still contemplating his existence at this hour. We hope this edited version of the interview will help reveal some of the questions concerning the cloak of mystery surrounding the Elevators.

Larry Sepulvado

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE 13TH FLOOR ELEVATORS

CAL STANLEY: Who picked the title for your new album, Easter Everywhere?
TOMMY HALL: Well, I did.
CAL: Any particular reason for it?
TOMMY: Well, it comes from the idea of Christ consciousness. And realizing that you can be born again; that you can constantly change and be reformed into a better and better person. It's like a progressive perfection and Easter Everywhere is sort of the combination or culmination of this idea as echoed in the public. It's like everyone is snapping to this; that there is a middle ground between the Eastern trip and the Western trip and that is by learning to use your emotion and realizing what emotion is and why it is there and how to control it from a pleasure point of view, so that you don't get hung up in a down place. It's just the idea of rising from the dead all over, everywhere.
CAL: How long have you been working on this album?
TOMMY: We just got together and started work on it. So we've been together what, about two months?
DAN GALINDO: Since the beginning of July.
CAL: So, it was put together in two months then?
TOMMY: All but two songs, "She Lives" and "Levitation", which were already recorded.
CAL: How did you develop your particular sound, the jug particularly?
TOMMY: We just wanted to make a music that could show a groovy place to people. So, we just tried to get together at as groovy a place as we could that had as many exposures, views, or photos of the different sides of the groovy place. A place that was evolving which you could come up from, all the time. Each of us tried to put his concept of that place and the total sum of it into our music.

Tommy Hall

Stacy Sutherland

DANNY THOMAS: It's like the lyrics have the main emphasis and the music is used as an accent and vehicle for the lyrics. In other words, the music is a bed for the lyrics to lie in, a bed of flowers.

TOMMY: It's half and half because the words are states of minds and the music is the emotion you feel with that state of mind.

DAN G.: I would like to interject this. Since this is the first go around for the present group, I feel our music will improve considerably. As the words get higher and carry more meaning our music will improve and take on new forms, new shapes, new ideas.

CAL: How do you go about putting one of your songs together? Who writes the music, who writes the lyrics or is it a group thing?

TOMMY: Sometimes Roky writes the music and sometimes Stacy. We'll get ideas from places or each other and I'll write a song about it. Then we all get together and arrange.

LARRY SEPULVADO: Who have been the previous members?

TOMMY: We've gotten a new drummer and bassman. The previous drummer's name was John Ike and the bassman was Ronnie Leatherman. We also had a previous bassman before that, Bennie.

LARRY: What band experience has the group had prior to the Elevators?

TOMMY: I've had none. Roky has been with another group.

DAN G.: I've had relatively little to speak of. I've been in it now over two years and most of that was spent looking for bands to play with...(laughter)...I just happened to be in the right spot at the right time.

DANNY T.: I was mostly playing on the East Coast; Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.

LARRY: Several months ago on the cover of Life Magazine, a poster advertising your appearance at the Avalon ballroom was featured with many other posters. What exactly took the Elevators out to the West Coast the early part of this year?

TOMMY: Because we were a band that presented states of mind.

LARRY: As far as psychedelic music, whatever that connotates, the Elevators were at the beginning of this movement as much as anybody.

TOMMY: Like we were the first group to advertise as psychedelic. Like we advertised as psychedelic and two weeks later the Grateful Dead played their first gig and they advertised as psychedelic.

LARRY: What was your impression when you originally arrived there?

TOMMY: It was a gas...(laughter)...It was just beautiful.

LARRY: Right now it seems most of the people that are there have turned into vegetables or...

TOMMY: No, not necessarily. It's like all the groovy people have left and are just doing their thing. When it first started out everyone said, "Hey, there are groovy people out there". So, everybody comes and they couldn't help what happened. Like they were all in different stages of evolution and the groovy people stayed together, so they could continue their thing.
LARRY: I've heard that The Dead have moved to New Mexico which is a sign that things are scattering out. There's not anything in San Francisco that you could consider a whole now, is there?
TOMMY: In any scene, you have to make your own scene. If you want to evolve you have to do it yourself. A certain amount is done for you but if you want to evolve faster you have to work. You have to go out and meet the people and sift through everybody and get finer and finer until you have got a nice scene and it's hard because there are so many people out there doing the same thing.
LARRY: How long were you out on the coast?
TOMMY: About two months.
ROKY ERIKSON: Was it that long?
CAL: With this thing going on in Frisco, why did you choose Houston as your base of operation?
TOMMY: Because the record company's here.
LARRY: From the bay area where did you go? People I know in New York have heard of the Elevators there. Have you played the East Coast?
TOMMY: No, we had a lot of trouble. That's why we have a new drummer. Like he totally messed things up for us as far as the East Coast because he was always quibbling about who should manage us. We tried to book gigs in New York but he called the people up and told them that the people hadn't booked us and they canceled everything. This made our record company mad and he sued our record company. So, we've had a lot of trouble as far as personnel and all of us working together.
LARRY: "You're Gonna Miss Me", your first record, received a lot of exposure, didn't it? Like your name has appeared in most of the periodicals when they list psychedelic groups.
TOMMY: Yes, we've been fortunate.
CAL: How do you feel your music stands in relation to the current musical scene?
TOMMY: We're just doing a different thing. Right now as our playing live gets better and better; well, like we're approaching it from a different view. We're approaching it from an emotional viewpoint rather than a musical one. As our music develops, we, as a group, develop emotion together.
CAL: It takes awhile to develop this group thinking, doesn't it?

Danny Thomas

TOMMY: That's true. It would be hard to compare us with anybody else because we're concentrating our thing on designing geometric states of mind. I think Dylan is doing the same thing. We're developing our music along the same lines...no, not the same lines but in the same way.
LARRY: One thing that I haven't understood is why the Elevators have not caught on nationwide. Through the somewhat collage of quality groups appearing now, this group has a distinctive sound which sets it apart from the others. Your lyric content, especially in your latest album, is as competent as anything available.
TOMMY: Well, one thing is that our record company has sort of been scared to do anything for us because of hassles with the past members of the group. Right now, they are behind us because we're together solid now.
CAL: Has that been the reason for the lack of publicity?
DAN G.: There will be publicity on this album. There'll be ads in Record World, Cashboard, Billbox. I mean Billboard...(laughter)...There will be publicity on this one.
LARRY: Talking about Billboard, they did feature the first album in their national album reviews, but it didn't move on the national charts.
DAN G.: That's because it didn't move enough.
TOMMY: We didn't push.

Dan Galindo

LARRY: Exactly where was it distributed and where did it sell?
TOMMY: Well, it's like we're putting out psychedelic music and we like to feel that it really is psychedelic. We have had a hard time selling in places where they don't understand psychedelic music. They don't know what to listen for. The psychedelic scene is spreading very fast but then we were sort of caught because people just weren't there when we were. The Doors and Jimi Hendrix are beginning to sell now and I think the market is changing in a good way as far as psychedelic music.
LARRY: That's why I have faith in the Elevators eventually making it nationally because you a are sincere about what you are doing and did not jump on the bandwagon to capitalize on a trend.
TOMMY: What the other groups did was to just play the musical side of it. But things are different. This is not just music anymore. These people were playing it from this standpoint; they were just imitating the music.

CAL: Speaking of that, what was your reaction to the Clique's version of "Splash I".
TOMMY: It was groovy.
LARRY: Off the album, it was just another good cut but the vocal on the Clique's version did not convey this lyrical emotion. I didn't get the feeling that the words meant the same.
DAN G.: That arrangement seems like it was tailored for a particular market and in my opinion, was well done for the market it was intended to appeal to.
DANNY T.: It was arranged and produced very well.
LARRY: Clementine Hall is your wife, isn't she?
TOMMY: Yes, she's the one who thought of our name--The 13th Floor Elevators.
LARRY: That is her singing on "I Had to Tell You".
TOMMY: Yes. She wrote it and "Splash I".
CAL: What kind of plans do you have for the future?
TOMMY: We're going to tour the East and West Coasts and we have a new single that we have got to record.
LARRY: Your next single will not be from the album?
TOMMY: Well, "She Lives" will be released from the album.
DAN G.: We're going to be working on the single after that. It will be on our third album which International Artists would like us to have ready by February.
CAL: Or else?
TOMMY: We're in a groovy place right now with the record company. We just don't have any more problems.
LARRY: Whose idea was it to bring in Frank Davis as the recording engineer for the latest album?
TOMMY: It was all of ours. We wanted an eight-track studio.
LARRY: I saw you at the Frank Davis concert at the Jewish Community Center. That was really wild. That tape he played at the end of the set demonstrated he was really into something.
TOMMY: He really has some good stuff.
DANNY T.: That tape is going to be released as an album.
TOMMY: His mixing is very good. As far as mixing, he is a genius.
LARRY: Speaking of Davis, why was Guy Clark brought in to take photos for the album? He's been out of the public eye for quite some time.
DAN G:: He takes good pictures.
TOMMY: Guy is a very beautiful person.
LARRY: Is he working with the group in any way?
TOMMY: No, just the photos. I met Guy through Russell Wheelock, who also helped take the photos for the album. I've known Russell for a long time. I think it was Leland's (Rogers, their producer) idea to use Guy.
CAL: Throughout your music, do you feel that you have one message or theme that you are trying to convey?
TOMMY: It's like we're all humans who have reached the point where if we all just give each other ideas, everyone will be able to come up. We're trying to work out the grooviest ideas we can. It's looking at phonograph records as a new book and a new kind of feedback man is giving himself. It's like man is talking to himself. Somebody can listen to a phonograph and go to a groovy place.
LARRY: That's what's good about your albums. If you let them, they can explore your mind. It can be an experience like reading a book.
DANNY T.: But it is more of an experience than that.
LARRY: It's an idea developed elsewhere in this magazine. This business of music being the literature of our times.
CAL: Like classical music, it's an emotional experience and from this standpoint your music is along the same lines. Like when some people hear this music, all they hear is noise or abstractions and that's all they hear.

Roky Erickson

TOMMY: Man has the power to identify with anything. If you want to turn yourself into a Coke bottle you can, and it's much easier on psychedelics. So, man in the future is going to be sitting in front of one of these albums, not necessarily ours, and the album will do a thing to him that would be like music and would not normally be expected. It would make him totally disassociate his actual ever-continuing self from his perishable egg shell earth presence and he would go to a completely different world. And the more he does that, the more he can learn about that world of immortality which is just a feeling. That's what we're trying to play in our music, the immortal theme, because it's like Christ said, "We're already immortal from in front". It's just knowing that feeling or mood that is what everyone is trying to put down on record for man to remember.

CAL: You are playing at Love Street this week and next?

DAN G.: Yes, we have a schedule around here somewhere.

TOMMY: Yes, this week and Thanksgiving. Then December 1, we play Austin, and then Bryan, and then we are off to Detroit. It's going to be real hard for us to play Detroit because we have to drive to San Francisco the following week. We will be in the Avalon the third week of December.

LARRY: Since you are going to Detroit, I assume there will be advance publicity? Has the album been out long enough for you to tell exactly how it has been received?

DANNY T.: 7,700 sold.

TOMMY: If it continues to sell like it is, it should be on the national charts in about three weeks.

CAL: Are you satisfied with your recorded sound? Is this the sound you're trying to get across?

TOMMY: It's like Scott Holtzman said, "There's a closeness that's just not there".

LARRY: Right. Because this is not the same thing when you see this live.

DAN G.: I would like to say one thing. Danny Thomas and myself, this is our first album. We had never played a job together. We had to do it the hard way, as hard as anyone could have done it. All this album is really , is an indication of the potential we have in this group. Our following albums will be much, much better and as the group tightens and the quality improves, so will our recordings.

LARRY: Earlier, I had mentioned to Tommy that the Elevators I saw at the Living Eye, earlier this year had a real tight sound. It was great.

DAN G.: Yes, but that group had been together for two years.

LARRY: I guess, everyone sort of feels the other out not only from within the group but establishing communication with the audience?

DAN G.: It's group communication and that's something we're developing right now. Danny Thomas and myself work together as much as possible. As we work, things will come more natural and soon we won't have to think about the beat. It will just be there. Danny will know what to do, I'll know what to do and along with Roky and Stacy we'll produce a picture, a musical picture with each part different but all fitting together perfectly. Right now there are a few spots and cracks but they are rapidly filling.

CAL: How can someone contact you for public appearances?

DAN G.: Artists Management Company, 1005 Americana Building, Houston.

CAL: That concludes our interview.

DANNY T.: As a final word, you might mention that the magazine you are getting ready to publish is working along the same direction as we are; that you are trying to do something better than the usual.

CAL: Thanks.

TOMMY: Larry, may I wish you luck on your magazine.

LARRY: Tommy, I thank you and the rest of the group for permitting this interview. We appreciate you giving us some of your time.